

# The Leading Lady

(Continued from Page Three)

the throbbing beat of an engine came through the silence, a low spark of light was advancing from the opposite shore.

When he heard the boat grinding against the wharf he waked Bassett.

"Rawson's coming. And it's nearly nine."

Rawson came in by the window, his eyes blinking in the room's brightness. He tried to look stern but satisfaction shone in his eyes and lit his long lantern-jawed face. He was like the bearer of good tidings who could have worn the high smile of triumph if a smile were fitting.

"Well," said Williams, "where the devil have you been?"

"Down the coast, twenty-five miles, on roads that would have put anything but a flyover out of commission."

"You got something?"

"I did—this time. We're on the right track now if I'm not much mistaken."

Williams gave an incredulous grunt. He did not believe in new material, and in advance placed himself in stubborn opposition.

"What did you go down the coast for?"

"To find a man called Gabriel Harvey."

Bassett, about to sit down, stopped in surprise.

"Gabriel Harvey? That's our launchman."

"Exactly. And I had a devil of a time to find him. Down in a place called White Beach, hidden away with friends in a shack without a telephone."

"But why?"

"I'll tell you. I went over there to look into Joe Tracy's movements. I couldn't find any one who'd seen him come ashore, and learned that the man Gabriel, who took him over, had gone to this place, White Beach, for deep-sea fishing. Not being able to get hold of him, I went to the station to see if I could gather up anything. And I did. The baggage man told me Gabriel had been there before he left for White Beach, leaving a suitcase and fishing rod to be held till Tracy called for them. They're there now. I saw them."

Williams said nothing, not ready with argument till more was divulged. Bassett, in blank amazement, ejaculated:

"Why, that's the most extraordinary thing—"

"Wait, Mr. Bassett," Rawson said a long commanding hand, hung round till the evening train came in; that's the train Tracy was a take. I saw the conductor—it's a small branch road and travel is light at that hour—and he remembered his passengers, two women and a child. Those were the only people who left Haynes Beach, seven-fifteen, the last evening train. I went back to the village and made inquiries. Tracy had hired no vehicle at the garage or livery stable, nor had he been seen anywhere about the place. Then I got a car and went to White Beach. I was some time locating the old chap, but I finally ran him down. He said he had not taken Tracy across to the mainland last night."

Rawson dropped back in his chair. In answer to Bassett's expression he nodded soberly.

"Yes, it's a pretty queer business. Gabriel said he'd told the boy to be on time; made it clear to him that he wouldn't wait.

wrong some way—he was capable of it, I'm not defending him—and been frightened and lit out."

"How did he get off?"

Bassett's voice was raised in his exasperation:

"Good Lord, Rawson, we weren't jailed here then. He could have had a boat hidden in one of the coves. This place wasn't escape-proof till you turned up. He could have rowed ashore and landed anywhere, and that's what he's done."

"Unless he's here."

"Here on the island?" Williams spoke with an air of patient reminder. "Ain't we gone over it with a fine-tooth comb?"

Rawson pointed to the ceiling. "How about that top story? A person—we won't say who—could have killed the woman, entered the house while the rest of you were on the beach, put back the pistol, and gone upstairs."

Williams made a motion to leave himself up from his chair.

"Wait, if that's how you feel about it let's go up and have a look for the person."

"We needn't do that just now. They're as safe as if they were behind bars. There is something I want to do down here first—have a talk with Miss Tracy. She may be able to give us a little light."

"She can't help you," said Bassett. "They weren't on confidential terms. She'd be the last person he'd tell anything to."

He believed what he said, but his heart sank. Anne to be dragged through another interrogation, an interrogation with a hideous suspicion behind it!

Ramson rose.

"Perhaps so, but it's worth trying. She may know more than you think; sisters sometimes do. And she certainly must have more knowledge of him than any of us. We'll soon see."

"I'll go up and get her now." He moved toward the door.

(To Be Continued)

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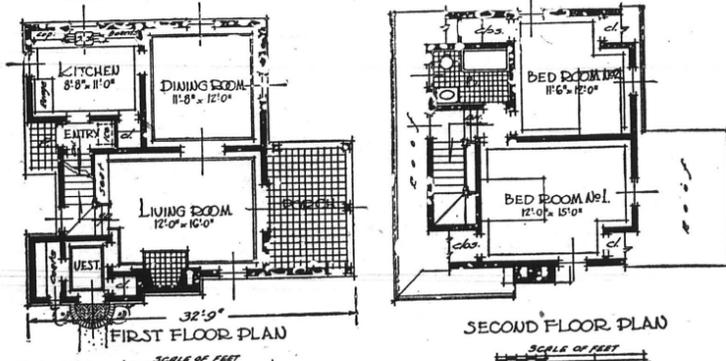
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